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Introduction

> "At the end of the day" I wrote of my first day in Dili, "I walked beyond Motael while waiting for the priests to return, and watched the fishermen prepare to set out for the night. Each boat had a kerosene pump lamp and the effect, as night fell on the small craft strung out upon the water, was magical. I symbolised it, of course, imagining these beads of light in the dark night between Dili and Atauro as hopes for the future. But I learned that most of the fishermen are not Timorese at all, but from other parts of Indonesia."

This was my own, and CIIR's first visit to East Timor. From December 1975, when the Indonesian army invaded the territory, until December 1978, East Timor was closed to private visits by Indonesian citizens as well as foreign travellers. Only a small number of people - especially politicians, diplomats and journalists, but also church officials - were given permission to visit.

From 1979, when a major famine was declared (following counter-insurgency operations), the International Committee of the Red Cross was permitted to maintain an office in Dili. The foreign staff of that office remain the only foreign aid or relief workers in East Timor.

In January 1989, in advance of Pope John Paul's visit to Indonesia and East Timor in October of that year, East Timor was declared "open" to visits by tourists and private citizens from Indonesia.

A number of people have gone to East Timor since then, and the majority of tourists have been able to travel relatively freely. Nevertheless, some journalists have been restricted in their movements and there have been virtually no visits by staff from organisations that have publicly defended the right of the Timorese to self-determination. As a precaution, therefore, I did not write ahead to church leaders in East Timor to say that I was coming. Nor, though I did not conceal who I was, did I announce my identity. I travelled as a tourist.

In practise it was rather easier than expected to preserve a degree of anonymity. I spoke no useful languages. As a result I was incapable of advanced conversation.[1] Frustrating at the time, this was perhaps a canny way to travel. East Timor is a highly controlled society, where politics remain extremely dangerous. It was wise as well as useful to begin conversations at the beginning, without presumption. A stranger, alone and speechless, I could not signal whose side I was on. If those I met cared to speak to me, they were forced to signal very basic messages. As a result, I feel rather sure of some of the simple observations I made - more sure than I could have been if I had been guided or articulate.

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[1] In general, Tetum is the language of resistance, spoken by the Timorese to each other; bahasa Indonesia is the official lingua franca - the language of occupation; and Portuguese a signal recalling liberty that triggers, among many who speak it, an appeal for solidarity.

Horta... or knew someone who knew him. He was singularly unkempt, with stubbled cheeks; an unlikely figure for the tourist shop. He said he would come to my hotel, but never did (or I was not there). I am fairly sure a motorcyclist went round the church at Motael to check that I was goingin to see the priests. It would not have been difficult to know where I was in Dili.

I have to say that, in retrospect, that it is possible that I was followed more scientifically. Looking back, a pattern could be made of my day in Ermera. I was effectively taken in hand all day by a man who was on the same bus as I was to Ermera. It was never quite clear what he did for a living -though he clearly had connections in the area [being married, he said, to the daughter of a local liurai]. I caused him to walk through the rain; and hitch back. It was surprising that he should give so much time to me. He never let me out of his sight.
In addition, it seemed to me that the priest to whom I carried a letter of introduction (which he read with extraordinary attention) was very reserved because of M's presence; our conversation remained wholly banal. There were other small incidents with others we met. Finally, he never indicated that we should report to the police on arrival in the town in the valley, or Ermera. [Rather, he talked of "calling in" on some contacts - which may have come to the same thing.] Was M. an informer, or was he simply friendly (and underemployed)? He made no secret of his views, which were fully integrationist. Could he have been on the bus to pick me up? It is possible, though I remain doubtful.

Finally I should note that, with Caroline and Juanita I climbed Mount Ramelau - Timor's highest peak. Before we set out we learned that Gen. Sutrisno, Commander-in-Chief of Indonesia's armed forces, would arrive two days later (Tuesday) in Ramelau to support the troops on mission in the area [on the occasionof the Muslim Festival of .....] About one houor after we reached the top an officer, dressed in sports clothes and without arms, and two militiamen, both armed with unmodern rifles, arrived on the summit to escort us down. They did escort us down, in some order at the start, and then in more relaxed fashion. Our guess was the officer fancied talking to the women; but he did say that we were in a security zone, and that they wanted to make sure we were "alright".

Dili

When I first walked around Dili, I was struck by its dilapidated, untended appearance. I was a little shocked by my reaction: what had I expected? With time, I became more aware of the large number of new administrative buildings in the town. If I picture Dili now, I see images of neglect and poverty overlaid by rows of white government offices and barracks busy with young men in camouflage. As a summary of the occupation, it is not altogether inaccurate.

On reflection, I realized it was Dili's public spaces that are neglected. The pavements are full of holes - a danger at night because there is little street lighting. The draincovers have gone. The seafront is entirely undeveloped. Horses and goats browse the grass outside the Bishop's residence up to the edge of the unswept beach, littered with tin cans and garbage, where landing craft from the invasion still rust in the water. Pigs trot up and down the road in front of the new Cathedral. Cows graze next to a barracks, midway between the bus station, the stadium and the principal hotel. Virtually the only public area that is carefully maintained is the space in front of the Governor's office.

Much greater care is taken, however, of private land. Beyond the church at Motael are very handsome villas occupied by government and military officials. Land cruisers and jeeps line their forecourts. The parliament building, the Cathedral,

steep; they are crisscrossed with paths and covered with small patches of cultivation - everywhere there are signs of people. But there are few places where erosion has created large flat valleys suitable for rice cultivation. The environment as a whole strongly reminded me of Madagascar - which has the same pattern of tropical forest and fire-eroded grassland.

The roads are narrow, so that it is difficult for vehicles to pass. However, there is little traffic; a few private cars, buses at the beginning and end of the day, and lorries. I was there at the end of the rainy season, and it so happened that an unusual amount of rain had fallen recently. Though main roads were generally covered and in passable condition, there were rockfalls and at points the road's edge had collapsed. On the road to Batugade stretches of tarmac had gone altogether and passage was difficult even for lorries and buses. Smaller roads, like the route to Ramelau, are virtually inaccessible except to very experienced drivers and/or four-wheel drive vehicles.

Rural living standards

I tried to work out from the housing patterns how people are living. I gained an unsatisfactorily partial impression, and cannot be sure that the comments below are accurate or representative.

First of all, I saw few sites that looked like strategic hamlets. There was one large group of zinc-roofed houses below Ermera; I was told by my (non-Timorese) companion that these were occupied by officials and teachers. It may be that fewer strategic hamlets were built in the areas that I visited.

Secondly, there is a considerable amount of building going on. The principal contractor is the government, which is commissioning schools, administrative offices, and even (in Ramelau) tourist guesthouses. The ICRC nurse told me that many people are moving to live by the roads - which in some places, of course, have been markedly improved or extended. I would guess that there is a movement of people into the larger villages.

Thirdly, many families in the rural areas around Maubisse are living in the way I take to be traditional - in small groups of one to three houses spaced over the land. They are farming small plots of corn and other crops. They are also cultivating plots at altitude in the mountains. When we climbed Mount Ramelau (which is still a security area and is not far from Ainaro, where military operations continue) we saw several people working swidden plots at 9000 feet; there was evidence of cultivation on the mountain slopes all round. Small groups of buffalo, and horses, were being grazed as well. If people were militarily regrouped in the areas I visited - and Maubisse and Ermera both suffered serious loss of life in the 1970s - I conclude that many of the restrictions have been lifted.[3]

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3 It is impossible to say how representative this judgement is, but it is relevant to note here that it was confirmed to me that military operations have moved from the Eastern region to the central area south of Dili - slightly south of where I went. I did not have time to visit the Eastern zone, but the relative freedom of movement and cultivation I observed around Maubisse and Ramelau suggest that conditions in the East may not now be worse.

At the same time, it is clear that many people have recently been arrested on political grounds, that detainees suffer torture and other abuses, and that aggressive military operations involving large numbers of troops have been taking place in Ainaro and in other parts of central East Timor[6]. If this is the case, what can be said to have changed? How should the political environment be described? In what respects do conditions in East Timor differ from those in other parts of Indonesia?

Three factors should be singled out. The first is East Timor's nationalist movement, which has survived - both as a political organisation and as an idea - and which Timorese leaders say is more united and more representative than ever. The second is the people's memory - of the traumatic violence suffered since 1975 and of the colonial regime that preceded it. The third factor is the quality of intelligence now enjoyed by the Indonesian military.

Nationalism

Every Timorese to whom I talked about self-determination, including those who accept integration as a fait accompli, agreed that the great majority of Timorese are unreconciled to Indonesian rule and would change their political status if they could. A senior foreign priest took the same view, though he regarded this aspiration as quite unrealistic. The fact is more or less acknowledged in the important academic report prepared by Prof. Mubyarto of Gadja Mada university [7]. It is also, of course, the assumption that underpins a series of statements published during the 1980s by catholic church leaders [8].

The Timorese refusal to accept integration remains the fundamental challenge confronting the army, the government, the church and key economic and social institutions in East Timor.

This refusal is sustained by nationalist idea. Other communities within Indonesia cherish their idea of independence, of course. One crucial political difference separating East Timor from other parts of Indonesia, therefore, is the fact that in East Timor the nationalist movement is organised across the territory. It has a

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6 It was confirmed by a number of people while I was in East Timor that troops were still hunting Fretilin guerrillas in the area of Ainaro. Regarding torture and detentions, see Amnesty International [Ref:]. Donaciano Gomes and other refugees have testified to being tortured in the period following the Pope's visit in October 1989 [Ref.]. The detention and torture of young people for demonstrating against Indonesian rule has been documented, for example by A Paz e Possivel (Lisbon) which recently published a list of those detained during 1990 [Ref.].

7 reference.

8 See for example the statement issued by the Church Council on January 1st, 1985; Belo's letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations, February 1989; letters of the Timorese clergy to xxxx in ... 1989.

Conflict "management"

If these speculations are correct, what sort of political system is it likely to generate?

First of all, it should be said clearly that **there is a general consensus in Dili that the majority of Timorese are opposed to Indonesian rule, and this consensus largely determines the policies of those responsible for political affairs.** I find it implausible to suppose that this assumption is not shared by the intelligence community, a good proportion of military commanders, most experienced local officials as well as leaders in the church etc. This simple, inescapable fact is at the heart of the Timor problem.

[The existence of this local consensus should incidentally be emphasised because it means that much of the public diplomatic debate abroad is essentially decorative, and fails to address the problem as it presents itself locally.]

For the Indonesian government, drawing this conclusion means admitting that, after years of vicious and debilitating war, it has forfeited the support of the Timorese for at least another generation. It was clear that the older generation -including many of those who now occupy positions of influence - had been alienated. It is now evident that students and those in secondary schools have converted to nationalism virtually en masse. Though courted by various material incentives, they have been frustrated by the lack of employment and above all feel a higher loyalty toward their families.

Suppressing this opposition by mere force is essentially unrealistic, for the political reasons indicated above - and also because violence has signally failed to end resistance in East Timor. Instead, I would suggest that the authorities are trying out a strategy designed to enable the Indonesian government to "manage" East Timor **even if the majority of its people may continue to support the nationalist project for years to come.**

This statement should be set in context. The Indonesian military - who have the final say on what happens in East Timor - do not have a single view on how to handle East timor. The army command may revert to a strategy that is more punitive than the approach favoured at present by Gen. Warouw. Nor is it possible to foresee the consequences for East Timor of general changes in Indonesia's political environment, as President Suharto's long rule draws to an end. I should add too that, in making the remarks below, i am assuming that, however East Timor is "managed" in coming years, the Indonesian authorities will apply policies that are seen to be compatible with the government's long-term economic and political interests. These include: reducing threats of public disorder to a minimum; reducing East Timor's cost to the national exchequer; increasing the territory's economic productivity; removing East Timor from the list of international disputes; gradually eliminating local resistance to integration.

The point about a "management" strategy is that it assumes East Timor's international status can be settled separately from, and before local opposition ends; and that the territory can be "governed" successfully without popular convrsion to integration.

In practise, to maintain such a policy of control depends upon high quality intelligence, and very detailed monitoring of the nationalist movement. Since the

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the main objective of the guerrillas was to survive.

eventual settlement. In other countries where grave violations have taken place, such as Chile, Cambodia and Argentina, it has eventually been found necessary to acknowledge and record the terrible events that occurred in order to effect some form of social reconciliation. It is hard to imagine the Timorese achieving any reconciliation with Indonesia until they have been allowed to speak about what has happened to them and their country. They want the truth told, as they see it. At the same time, the numerous potent descriptions of misery, suffering and cruelty that will emerge are likely to be politically intolerable to the Indonesian authorities and especially to the military. While suppressed, the memory will fester and live on: if released, it could blow away like a great wind all the government's efforts to establish legitimacy.

Some of those to whom I spoke also emphasised that memories of the Portuguese colonial regime also sustain the alienation, even contempt, that many Timorese feel for the Indonesian system of government.

In saying this it should be stressed that no-one to whom I spoke in East Timor defended the quality of Portuguese rule. It was everywhere acknowledged that Portugal had failed to develop the country economically, held back political modernisation, and failed to educate and train the people.

Nevertheless, people compared the two systems. One, for example, told me that both were forms of dictatorship. But the system of Caetano and Salazar distinguished the civil from the military authority, which the Indonesian system does not, and as a result the Portuguese colonial authorities could sanction military abuses and excesses. Indonesia's failure to separate powers leads many Timorese to consider that Indonesia has a corrupt form of government. In addition, the lack of military accountability has been an important cause of military violence during Indonesian rule.

Another judgement frequently made is that the Indonesian authorities - and incomers - do not treat people correctly and are disrespectful. They expect the Timorese to adopt their [Javanese] way of life and regard the Timorese lifestyle as inferior or backward. Many Timorese find this intolerable, not least because they consider that the quality of public life has been degraded during Indonesian rule, especially by corruption and nepotism, which are endemic in Indonesia and have been imported into East Timor. Here too the Timorese make an implicit comparison with the Portuguese period.

In general, the Timorese to whom I spoke considered Portuguese rule to have been preferable to Indonesian rule. There is, naturally, an element of nostalgia in this judgement, but it should not be overestimated. Many Timorese do indeed remember what life was like under the Portuguese. I would say that the essence of the Timorese view is that the Indonesians have colonised East Timor just like the Portuguese, but they have shown less respect for Timor's people and been far more violent.

some of the players - but is almost invisible to the casual view. In sum, the Indonesian authorities believe that in the long term they can co-opt Timorese nationalism into submission; whereas the nationalists believe they can play the same game longer and better and emerge in the end with a stronger hand than their enemy. Beneath the ceaseless political negotiation and exchange is the ever-present threat of violence. Used when it is useful for effect, or when the political management fails, it continues to cause the deaths of dozens of Timorese and also Indonesian soldiers every year.

4 Foreign NGOs and the need for development